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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0127  
INFO IGAD COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 002485

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/15

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [KE](#)

SUBJECT: National Youth Forum Pushes on the Reform Agenda

REF: NAIROBI 2338

CLASSIFIED BY: Michael E. Ranneberger, Ambassador, DOS, EXEC; REASON:  
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. Summary. On November 17 a National Youth Forum was held in Nairobi with U.S. financial support. The Forum was organized by 66 independent youth organizations and brought together representatives from every constituency in the country. The fact that the coalition government at the highest levels sought to press us not to support this initiative (reftel) testifies to the constructive impact that the Mission's youth outreach activities are having to propel domestic-driven pressure for implementation of the reform agenda. The Forum adopted bold recommendations. As will be detailed in a septel, we are providing follow-up support. End summary.

¶2. Reftel reported on our support for grassroots youth organizations to hold a National Youth Forum in November as part of efforts to maintain and increase pressure for implementation of the reform agenda. The Forum took place in the context of continuing Mission efforts to expand outreach to youth and to expand support for independent grassroots youth organizations as part of a broader process of propelling domestic-driven pressure for implementation of the reform agenda. These outreach and support efforts are significantly increasing pressure on the coalition leadership and political class with respect to the reform agenda. The impact we are having was demonstrated by the fact that the most senior levels of the coalition government expressed concern to the Ambassador about the holding of the National Youth Forum and sought to pressure us to curtail such activity. As reported, we pushed back firmly (see reftel).

¶3. With U.S. funding and support (through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives), the National Youth Forum took place as planned on November 17 at the Kenyatta International Conference Center in Nairobi. Sixty-six grassroots organizations organized the meeting. Though we provided funding, the youth groups determined the agenda and participation; over 700 youth delegates from every constituency in the country attended. The Ambassador along with other diplomatic colleagues (including the UK, Dutch, EC representative, Swiss, German, and others) observed part of the proceedings. All the observers were struck by the orderly nature of the deliberations and by the high caliber of the comments and discussions.

¶4. There was an attempt to disrupt the proceedings (precisely who was responsible for this is unclear), but the Forum organizers invited those youth sent to be disruptive into the Forum and the effort to disrupt proved abortive.

¶5. The Forum was covered extensively by the media, including

an national live coverage on one of the main television channels.

¶16. The Forum adopted a set of resolutions with proposed courses of action. The resolutions open by citing the failure of the national leadership to move decisively on reforms and by condemning the "outright impunity by the ruling elite." The youth leaders commit themselves to mobilize millions of young people to provide input into the ongoing constitutional revision process and to push peacefully for implementation of the reform agenda. The resolutions emphasize the need to hold political leaders accountable in order to end the culture of impunity, and stress the importance of International Criminal Court prosecutions of perpetrators of post-election violence. The resolutions call for the mobilization of youth in each parliamentary constituency in order to press parliamentarians to support implementation of reforms. The youth leaders call on the government to work with them in a transparent manner to promote youth employment and development.

¶17. The resolutions also call for the youth leaders to "mobilize and organize young people from all parts of the country to develop enviable and compelling political ideology that would guide their participation in the political leadership process." The resolutions "encourage young people to join or form political parties whose ideologies are in sync with the youth ideologies and use such structures to mobilize support for reform-minded youth

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leaders to join positions of leadership in order to change the country." The resolutions also urge that youth focus on the need to promote dialogues within and between ethnic groups in order to promote national cohesion and reconciliation.

¶18. The resolutions constitute the National Youth Forum as a standing mechanism for consultations, mobilization, and coordination among grassroots youth organizations. The resolutions state that structures and systems will be developed to manage and sustain the Forum, and to ensure follow through and implementation of the resolutions.

¶19. We are providing follow-up assistance to the Forum as part of our intensive efforts to support independent grassroots youth organizations to push peacefully for implementation of reforms. This follow-up support, which will be reported septel, includes, among other aspects, assistance for the regional youth forums, support for concurrently implementing the resolutions of the Forum, and providing immediate support for the necessary meetings and drafting of Forum recommendations to be submitted to the Committee of Experts on constitutional revision.  
RANNEBERGER